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AMEMBASSY YAOUNDE PASS TO AMEMBASSY MALABO

E.O. 12958: DECL: 2020/01/25  
TAGS: PREL PTER ASEC NI LI  
SUBJECT: NIGERIAN FM MAKES CASE TO REMOVE NIGERIA FROM SPECIAL COUNTRIES LIST

REF: 10 ABUJA 20

CLASSIFIED BY: Linda Thomas-Greenfield, Ambassador; REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

¶1. (C) Summary: Nigerian Foreign Minister Ojo Maduekwe visited Liberia January 13-14, publicly to cement ties between the two ECOWAS nations. But according to President Sirleaf, his mission seemed twofold: to seek the president's support in removing Nigeria from the TSA list of countries of interest and to assure the Liberians that there was no vacuum of power in Nigeria. The Foreign Minister used the occasion of both a speech to the Liberian Foreign Service Institute and a toast at an official dinner, both of which the Ambassador attended, to press the point that Nigeria is a partner with the United States, and not a threat. It appears that the Nigerians see President Sirleaf as a go-between in our relations. End Summary.

¶2. (C) President Sirleaf told Ambassador January 18 that Foreign Minister Maduekwe spent significant time during their bilateral meeting January 13 in an effort to enlist the president to assist in getting Nigeria removed from the TSA list of countries of interest. His second point was to assure the Liberians that the absence of President Yar'adua has not created a vacuum of power in Abuja.

¶3. (SBU) Later in the visit, Maduekwe, speaking before the Liberian Foreign Service Institute, took the opportunity of the Ambassador's presence to explain that while Nigeria is a major player in the region, there was an "800 pound elephant in the room" with whom ECOWAS countries needed to maintain good relations.

¶4. (SBU) Later at an official dinner, the Ambassador was asked to sit at the head table, and Maduekwe raised the importance of good relations in his toast. During the dinner he asked the Ambassador to relay to Washington to reconsider having Nigeria listed as a country of concern. The Ambassador replied that as U.S. Ambassador to Liberia, her greatest concern was to ensure that something of this nature did not happen in Liberia. She encouraged him to raise these concerns in Abuja. He said he was, but could not lose the opportunity to convey his concerns to her.

¶5. (C) Comment: Although Maduekwe indicated to Sirleaf that he would make the same demarche to other ECOWAS nations during his visit, it was clear that he saw the president as a conduit to the USG. However, the president shares our concern that in Monrovia we need to focus on the security situation at Liberia's airport. A TSA-ASSIST team was again in town recently assisting in making Roberts International Airport ICAO compliant. End Comment.

THOMAS-GREENFIELD